



A STUDY OF REFUGEES – SERBIA 2016

Friedrich Ebert Stiftung/Centre for Applied Social Research

A Study of refugees – Serbia 2016 CASR

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1. INTRODUCTION

Apart from the actual influx of refugees from the Middle East, in the coming years more intense migratory movements caused by political/security (war), economic (poverty, unemployment) or ecological (devastation of the environment) factors, can be expected.

Today in the world there are already about 60 million refugees, of whom only a small number are headed for Europe. It can be expected that their number will grow, and Europe will become a more desirable destination. We should not expect that in this era of globalization Europe will succeed – even if it wants - to stop or divert the migratory flow. Even if it partially prevents the influx, a significant number of refugees will succeed in coming to Europe. In this regard, it can be expected that a number of refugees will remain permanently in Serbia.

Hence the question is how to ensure the **integration** of refugees as the most appropriate way to achieve objectives and reconcile the requirements of the two key approaches regarding the refugee issue - humanitarian and security. On the one hand, adequate integration resolves the refugees' problems regarding why they left (humanitarian aspects), while on the other hand, it prevents the occurrence of problems that may occur in the countries they settle in, which is often a source of fear among the local population (the safety aspect).

The study, whose results are presented herein, focus on the extent to which the local population is willing to join in and accept the integration process of refugees. In other words, it attempts to find answers to the questions concerning the obstacles (specific to Serbia) to their integration and what the benefits and opportunities regarding the integration of refugees are for the local population, the economy, culture and politics.

The study had to answer the following questions:

1. What are the attitudes of the general population towards the integration of migrants and refugees in Serbia?
2. Do these attitudes differ according to region, religion, age, education, ethnicity, gender, economic and other differences?
3. To what extent are the respondents willing to engage in various forms of individual and collective action to facilitate, i.e. prevent the integration of the refugee and migrant population?
4. Do the attitudes of the general population differ with respect to the different groups of migrants?
5. How big is the influence of various leaders of public opinion in creating attitudes towards migrants and refugees, i.e. what are the channels of communication that the respondents are most responsive to?
6. What are the main causes of positive or negative attitudes towards migrants and refugees?
7. How do the respondents perceive the responsibilities of the different actors (state, non-governmental organisations, international organisations, local governments and the migrants themselves) in the process of solving the migrant crisis?
8. Do the respondents recognise the development potential of the eventual integration of the refugee and migrant population?
9. What are the key problems that the actors from local government and central authorities recognise in solving the issues of the integration of the migrant and refugee population?

2. THE METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

The study of refugees in Serbia was conducted in May 2016 and included a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. At the same time a survey was conducted on a sample of the general population (N = 986) and thirty interviews were conducted with local decision-makers.

The survey research was conducted on the territory of Serbia, excluding Kosovo. The respondents were adults from 115 places. The sample was a multi-staged stratified survey with a proportional share of regions. The basic distribution pattern corresponds to the distribution of the general population – according to gender, age, ethnicity and religious affiliation and education.

The instrument for the survey had 132 variables that were divided into the following dimensions: 1. Socio-demographic properties; 2. The general attitude towards refugees; 3. The integration of Refugees; 4 The obstacles to integration, 5. The development possibilities that integration offers.

The interviews were conducted with local actors, i.e. representatives of local governments, social work centers, the Red Cross and non-governmental organizations that were involved in various activities involving refugees in the previous period on the territory of the Republic of Serbia. A total of thirty interviews were conducted with respondents from Belgrade, Subotica, Šid, Dimitrovgrad, Bujanovac, Preševo and Vranje. The dimensions of the instructions for the interview coincided with the dimensions of the questionnaire for the general population.

3. THE GENERAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS MIGRANTS

Given that during the debate on the migrant crisis two basic approaches - humanitarian and security – were singled out, these were starting points for the analysis of attitudes towards migrants. The analysis of the general attitudes towards migrants and the migrant crisis has revealed very mixed feelings and a contradiction of attitudes of the majority of respondents. Nevertheless, the basic conclusion is that the majority of respondents have a humanitarian attitude towards migrants. The results presented in Figure 1 show that three-quarters of the population (75%) have a strong or very strong humanitarian attitude towards migrants, while, on the other hand, a little more than a half (52.9%) of the respondents expressed a strong or very strong attitude to security issues with regard to migrants. Of course, although there is a high degree of correlation in the relationship between the acceptance of the humanitarian and the rejection of the security approach, almost one-third of the population (31.5%) have an ambivalent attitude towards migrants, and therefore strongly accept both dimensions of this problem, i.e. accept both stands.

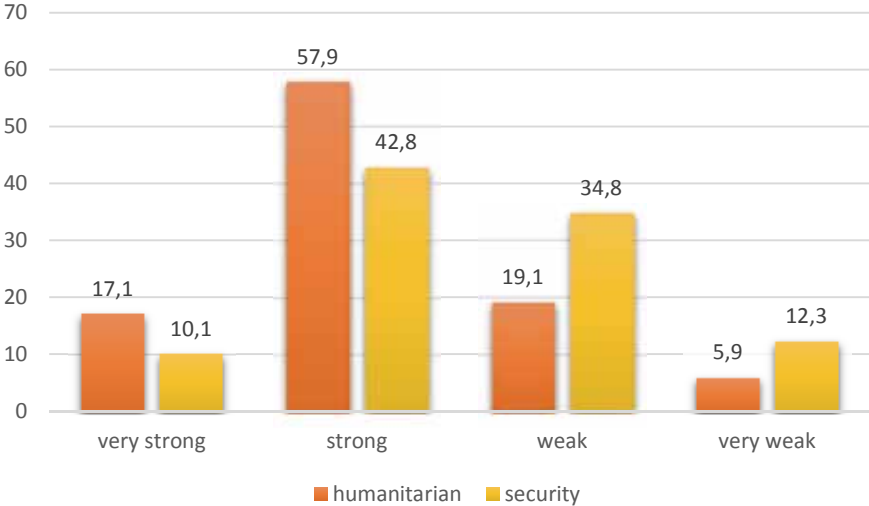


Figure 1: The acceptance of humanitarian and security perspectives

The humanitarian approach is more developed among citizens who live in small and medium-sized towns and the security approach in villages and large towns. Belgrade is specific because most citizens live there and both approaches are equally developed.

The most significant differences exist with respect to the age of the respondents. Young people under 30 have a significantly stronger security issue with migrants. In contrast, there is a significantly more pronounced humanitarian attitude with those between the ages of 50 and 60.

The respondents with the lowest and highest level of education have the most pronounced humanitarian attitude, while the security approach is more characteristic among those respondents with a secondary school education. Finally, there is a higher degree of empathy with people who themselves have had refugee experience. The same applies to those who have had direct contact with migrants from the Middle East.

For precisely this reason there is great discrepancy between the levels of acceptability of different models of care for migrants. Most respondents approve of their transit through Serbia, but it is an important to note that 60% of the respondents approve of temporary residence for migrants, while only a quarter agreed with the possibility of their permanent settlement in Serbia. Every tenth respondent has an extremely anti-migrant attitude and support the prohibition of their passage which could be achieved with the erection of barbed wire fences (Figure 2).

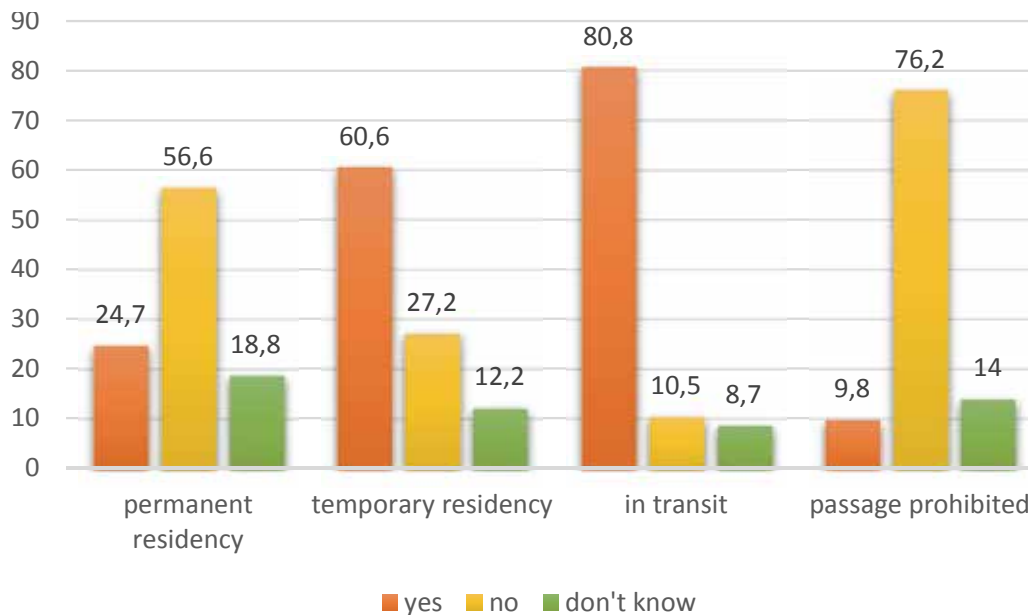


Figure 2: The acceptance of the resettlement of the migrant and refugee population

The analysis showed that the division among citizens regarding the migration issue is not consistent. In fact, to a certain extent it can be argued that there is a logical confusion of attitudes, however, such a situation is understandable given the multitude of contradictory messages, different interests, and ultimately the conflict between the emotional and rational relationship that the respondents have towards the migrant crisis.

The determination whether to accept the migrants is not only affected by attitudes towards them, but to a large extent it is also affected by the behaviour of neighbouring countries regarding this issue. During the migrant crisis one of the

main fears has been the possibility that Serbia will become a collection point for refugees who cannot enter the EU, and remain “trapped” in the territory of Serbia and the Balkans. In some parts of the country, especially in the south, the fear of change in the demographic structure in the case of the permanent settlement of migrants has been expressed in particular.

The formation of attitudes towards migrants is mostly affected by the media. It is therefore clear that communication concerning the migrant issue must take place through the media. On the other hand, it was precisely the cacophony of views on the migrant issue and sensationalist reporting with very little analysis that evoked both positive and negative emotions towards migrants, which lead to significant confusion in citizens’ attitudes towards the whole issue of the migrant crisis.

In the end, it is important to note that nearly four-fifths (79%) of the citizens of Serbia are aware of the fact that in the future more migrants can be expected. In this regard, people are aware that the migrant issue has not ended with the closure of the so-called “Balkan route” and that could make communication regarding the future admission of refugees easier.

4. THE INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES

The integration of the refugee and migrant population is one of the most important issues facing not only the European Union, but also those that are on the so-called refugee route. Therefore, we examined the perceptions and attitudes of the citizens of Serbia regarding the integration of the refugee and migrant population concerning several different dimensions: the preferred distribution of the migrant population, the desirability of certain categories of migrants, and the desirability of certain forms of political, cultural and economic integration.

The research results show that less than half of the population of Serbia (45.3%) are opposed to a more permanent settlement of migrants in Serbia, while almost one-tenth (9.4%) are opposed to the settlement of migrants in their municipality, but not against their settlement in other parts of Serbia. More than one-third of the respondents (34.9%) are indifferent to this issue; 7.3% of the respondents considered themselves advocates of the permanent settlement of migrants in Serbia, while only 3.2% of them had nothing against migrants settling in the territory of their municipality. The biggest differences in their willingness to accept the permanent settlement of migrants were according to their religious affiliation. **The strongest opposition to any permanent settling of migrants in the territory of Serbia was recorded among respondents who are Orthodox Christians (47.1%), while the least opposition was recorded among atheists (16.7%) and the Muslim population (25%).** At the same time, the largest proportion of those who advocate the permanent settlement of migrants in Serbia was recorded in the two last categories, although among the Muslim population none of the respondents are prepared to accept the settlement of migrants in the territory of their municipality. Apart from religious affiliation, factors that also affect the level of acceptance of the refugee and migrant population are the size of the place of residence (and thus **among the opponents of their permanent settlement, the citizens of Belgrade are in the lead** compared to the inhabitants of medium-sized towns, who decidedly expressed the least opposition), age (**the strongest supporters of the settlement of migrants in their municipality were respondents older than 70**, while the least support was among respondents aged between 40 and 49) and previous refugee experience (which leads to a significant decrease in the chances of the respondent declaring their opposition to the settlement of refugees or migrants).

Another aspect of integration refers to the categories of migrants the local population consider desirable, i.e. more acceptable than others. **For the respondents, women and children fleeing from war-affected areas are the most appropriate category of migrants/refugees.** However, the economic aspect is not insignificant for the respondents either, as evidenced by the findings that the following category is more acceptable than others, and includes those who are **economically secure and have their own capital**, followed by those who are **highly qualified**. However, this economic aspect is important only when referring to the “positive” selection of the migrant population, but not when it comes to those who would fill low-skilled and low-paid jobs. The religion of migrants is not of crucial importance, although for one proportion of the respondents (slightly more than one-third) it is very or quite important that migrants of **Christian denominations** become **potential residents**.

On the question relating to **the preferred territorial distribution of migrants, the largest number** (i.e. almost one-fifth) of the respondents state that **economically undeveloped and abandoned areas of the country are desirable locations**, 17.7% believe that it is advisable to settle them anywhere in the country, 17.4 % do not know, 5% state that they should be settled in parts of the country where the majority of the population is Muslim, while the largest number of respondents (slightly more than one-third) believe that none of the offered solutions is acceptable.

With regard to the methods for the distribution of the refugee and migrant population, the respondents were offered the following options: in larger groups spatially separated from the local population, in larger groups concentrated in areas of villages/towns where the local population lives, and individuals or several families in several different municipalities. The findings show that the majority of respondents (28.5%) believe that **the optimal solution implies the grouping of migrants at a level as less as possible, i.e. their even dispersal across the entire country** (answer: individuals or several families in several different municipalities). The second option (which, admittedly, received considerably fewer supporters - 14.9%), was the spatial grouping of migrants and their segregation from the local population, while the least desirable option was the concentration of large groups of migrants in areas together with the local inhabitants (11.4 %). However, it should be noted that 38.8% of the respondents could not make a decision when it comes to this issue, which shows the essential unwillingness of a substantial part of the population to expect such a scenario in the future.

One of the more important aspects of the whole integration process of the refugee and migrant population is their cultural integration into the local environment. An important aspect of cultural integration is the willingness of the local people to tolerate cultural diversity. This dimension we measured using indicators relating to the highly sensitive question of **Muslim women covering their faces. Slightly more than one-third of the respondents believe that it is their right and do not oppose this form of expression of this cultural specificity of this migrant population.** 11.4% of the respondents expressed a willingness to tolerate the traditional norms of Muslim women but only in the case of migrants who are staying temporarily in Serbia. On the other hand, 18.9% of the respondents believe that the head veil is not acceptable if migrants want to stay longer in Serbia, while almost one-fifth of the respondents say that it is not acceptable at all.

Another aspect of the tolerance of cultural diversity that we examined was related to the willingness of citizens to accept the erection of new mosques in Serbia in order to allow migrants of the Muslim faith to perform their religious rites. **A little over a half of the respondents (50.8%) see no problem in the building of mosques for migrants of the Muslim faith**, while more than one-third of the respondents are opposed to it.

Another significant aspect of the integration of migrants is the political dimension. With regard to the respondents' willingness to accept the political integration of migrants, we made conclusions based on questions relating to asylum seekers **gaining citizenship. The largest number of respondents (41.9%) believe that migrants and asylum seekers should not be given citizenship of the Republic of Serbia**; slightly more than a quarter (27.5%) believe that the optimal period is after five years of residency in Serbia, while one-tenth of the respondents (10.1%) believe that the period should be one to five years of residency in the country.

The next important aspect of the integration of migrants is their economic integration. We were interested in how the respondents perceive the role of the state in the process of the economic integration of this population, or, more specifically, whether the state should be engaged in finding jobs for migrants. A significant majority of respondents (68.5%) believe that **the state should first of all ensure that the local population is given priority regarding employment**, which, in the situation of scarce resources points to the remote possibility that the adequate economic integration of migrants will be carried out without any resistance from the local population. A significantly smaller number of respondents (13.8%) represent the liberal viewpoint that the state should not interfere in the labour market and intervene by giving preferential treatment to anyone, including migrants. Finally, only 6.5% of the respondents are prepared to support the view that the state should give incentives to employers who employ migrants, in order to assist in their economic integration.

A further aspect of economic integration that we examined was related to attitudes concerning the possibility that **the state give the migrant population uncultivated land and provide loans for agricultural production**. The answers to this question reveal that the opinions of the citizens of Serbia are divided: in fact, almost 35% of the respondents agree with the implementation by the state of this type of positive measure for migrants, 44.3% disagree, and one fifth have no opinion on the matter. An interesting finding is that the inhabitants of Belgrade (26.2%) and medium-sized towns (22.3%) to a much lesser extent agree with the position that the state should allocate land to migrants for cultivation as opposed to villagers and residents of small towns, who express their agreement in 41, 4% and 44.4% of cases, respectively. Another interesting finding is that, when it comes to regional disparities, a large share (43.4%) of the respondents from the least developed areas - **Southern and Eastern Serbia - have a positive attitude to uncultivated land being given to migrants**, while, as already mentioned, citizens of Belgrade agree the least with this measure.

5. THE OBSTACLES AND THE POTENTIAL FOR THE INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS

In addition to testing the potential, it is important to establish what the eventual obstacles are to the successful integration of migrants in Serbia. A significant part of these obstacles come from the structural characteristics of the society in whose framework it is necessary to integrate the migrant population. On the other hand, in addition to the structural characteristics, the labour potential of the population is also important. With regard to the latter, i.e. negative action, we examined the respondents' willingness to take part in one of the following types of activities: writing petitions against the settlement of migrants, participation in organized protests, followed by participation in violent measures to prevent the settlement of migrants, taking individual action against the settlement of migrants, and participation in a peaceful protest (such as the boycott of goods or services, etc.).

The data indicates that **the majority of respondents do not express readiness to participate in any of the negative forms of collective and individual action directed against the migrant population.** There is relatively strong rejection of all forms of violent action against the settlement of migrants (67.4% of the respondents reject participation in organized protests; 82.7% reject participation in organized violent action against migrants, while 86% reject violent individual involvement); while there was somewhat stronger (though still minor) support for **non-violent forms of negative action** directed towards the migrant population (such as writing petitions - 26.4% or a silent boycott - 19.9%).

Other forms of collective and individual action are those that are neutral or positive and can contribute to the successful integration of the migrant population. The results indicate that **there is neither a major willingness to take negatively directed action nor to take action that could potentially contribute to the integration of the migrant population.** In fact, only in the case of a neutral form, not taking action to prevent the settlement of migrants, slightly more than one-third of the respondents (33.8%) answered positively (with 40% not willing to take a neutral stand), while based on the whole sample, the majority rejected taking positive action (even 71.3% of the respondents rejected publicly supporting the settlement of migrants, while 52.4% rejected becoming involved in action that would help the integration of the migrant and refugee population).

In addition, the respondents' culturally defined willingness to tolerate various ethnic, religious and other minority groups was examined. The results indicate that although more than a half of the respondents **fully or partially agree with the view that members of their nation should be given priority with regard to various forms of benefits** (57.2% of the respondents believe that members of their nation should have the advantage when it comes to employment, 55.6% regarding social assistance, 55.9% regarding health care, 51% regarding free university tuition, and 55.8% regarding institutional benefits), it is important to point out that **well over one-third completely or partially reject such a possibility.** These findings corroborate the fact that nationalism, in a situation dominated by extreme material deprivation, is relatively strongly expressed, which shows that the potential for the integration of the migrant

population is limited. On the other hand, despite this, there is a negligible proportion of those who reject favouritism towards members of their own nation when it comes to different types of privileges and the right to exercise basic human rights (36% to 40%), which confirms the existence of a different socio-cultural matrix in Serbian society and points to the potential for the creation of a relatively tolerant society.

The successful integration of migrants is determined, to a significant degree, by the level of social distance of the local population. Therefore, we examined the extent to which respondents would be opposed to a member of the migrant population: a) receiving a scholarship to be educated in Serbia, b) becoming a doctor who treated them, c) becoming a teacher to their children, d) migrant children going with their children to kindergarten, f) becoming a member of their family, g) becoming a colleague at work, h) becoming their boss at work ii) becoming their next-door neighbour.

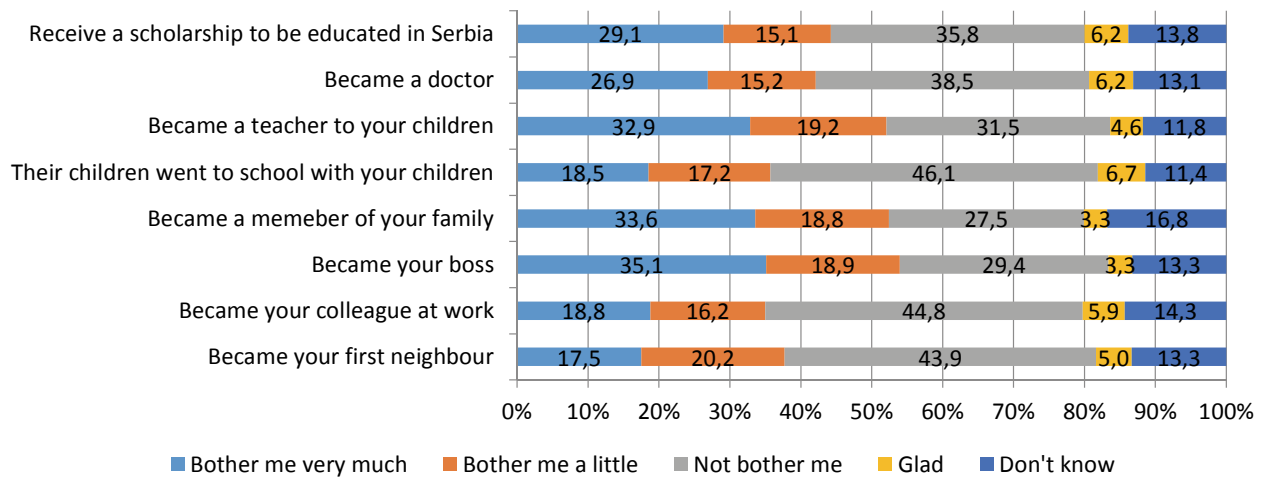


Figure 3: Social distance towards migrants

The findings suggest a few things. First of all, there is a significant division in Serbian society in terms of social distance towards the migrant population: in fact, in almost equal measure respondents indicate that they would mind or they would not mind if migrants were their neighbors, colleagues, bosses, doctors, teachers, etc. This finding testifies that **the potential and obstacles to the integration of migrants are equally expressed, but it also indicates that there is adequate space to work on educating the population and the preparation of conditions for the stable integration of the migrant population. Then, that the degree of social distance is not the same in all the tested dimensions. In fact, it is most strongly expressed in those dimensions that include the possibility of establishing close contact with members of the migrant population and possible intercultural exchanges** (to become part of their family, their children's teacher or physician). Also, a relative distance is expressed when it is understood that members of the migrant population should receive privileged status, i.e. if the relationship implies the existence of different levels of power (for example, the migrant becomes their boss or gets a scholarship in Serbia), but it significantly declines in the dimensions

that refer to those forms of social relationships which do not involve the possibility of direct contact with migrants or their privileged status (if the children of migrants went to kindergarten with their children, if the migrant was their colleague or neighbour). In other words, **a low social distance towards migrants remains at a level of superficial contact, which does not imply a high degree of intimacy or power relations.** At the same time, a low social distance regarding superficial contact testifies to relatively strongly expressed norms, which implies a tolerance for people of other nations, as well as the existence of humane attitudes toward people who have fled because of war and economic hardship. However, although a significant proportion of the respondents felt that they would not mind if migrants were part of their direct or indirect living environment, very few said they would be glad. In other words, **tolerance remains at a level of affective neutrality;** it is superficial in character and does not imply strong, affective commitment and cordiality.

Finally, an important indicator of the existence of potential obstacles, i.e. the potential for the integration of migrants, is represented in the attitudes to cultural differences between the local and migrant population. The way in which these differences are perceived is crucial for the possibility of creating a tolerant and multicultural social environment. Within this group of attitudes, the potential to willingly accept or reject a multicultural social environment was measured by the first statement: "It is better for a country if all the people have the same customs". The modal answer regarding this question shows that the respondents partially agree with this attitude (33.5%), so together with those who expressed complete agreement with this attitude (22.7%), clearly more than a half of the respondents desire a social environment that is culturally homogeneous. However, we should add that a little more than one-third of the respondents (36.3%) disagree with this view, which points to their recognition of the importance of tolerance, as well as to the importance of experiencing a multicultural social environment.

The following statement was affirmatively formulated and measures the degree of tolerance towards the cultural diversity of different ethnic groups ("Ethnic minorities have the right to maintain their customs and way of life"). Due to the different formulation of the previous questions the answers we got are somewhat contradictory. An overwhelming majority of respondents (85.8%) fully or partially agree with the given attitude, which seems to testify to a high level of ethnic tolerance. However, if one bears in mind that the majority of the respondents agree with the attitude on the desirability of a culturally homogeneous society, it is clear that there is confusion in values.

The third empirical statement was also positive (and normatively) formulated and referred to the view that all people, regardless of religious, ethnic and racial affiliation should have the same opportunities in Serbia. It is interesting that here we note a relatively high degree of tolerance for cultural diversity (59.2% fully or partially agree with the statement), although not to the same extent as in the previous attitude which is not normatively formulated (here the modal answer is in partial agreement, while regarding the previous statement it is in complete agreement). In other words, although there is a cultural norm of tolerance in Serbian society, (paradoxically, as there is a cultural norm of homogeneity), it is not unequivocally expressed. These types of norms are, therefore, less expressed in rural areas, among respondents of the Orthodox faith and those with a low education.

The research results indicate a few important issues. The first is that Serbia expresses a relatively strong cultural distance towards other ethnic, religious and racial groups, i.e. a relatively low level of tolerance for cultural diversity. However, this does not mean that the scope for the cultural integration of migrants has been completely narrowed, especially if one bears in mind that there was no domination of exclusive answers. Also, a significant part of the Serbian population live in multicultural environments and have experience of coexisting in communities that are religiously and ethnically diverse, which opens the possibility for further work on the construction of a tolerant society. Although in Serbia a social norm of hospitality is maintained, it basically remains superficial and affectively neutral, especially when it comes to socially sensitive privileges. Even though the citizens of Serbia in general show a relatively high degree of intolerance of cultural differences and nationalism, the findings suggest that they are rarely willing to engage in any form of violent or non-violent action directed against the migrant population. In the education process it is of the utmost importance to work with the young population and the citizens of Belgrade and small towns, in order to develop a more tolerant cultural dialogue, and thus facilitate the acceptance and integration of the refugee and migrant population. This ongoing work would be best organized through the inclusion of the growing numbers of volunteers working with the refugee population.

6. THE CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT OF INTEGRATION

This part of the research focuses on the potential social effects that the integration of the migrant population could produce in Serbia. The respondents' answers were grouped according to the following dimensions: economic, political, security, cultural and demographic obstacles and the development potential of integration.

The economic obstacles and the potential of integration

The economic aspects were singled out as the biggest obstacle to the successful integration of migrants. The majority of respondents (70.4%) believe that the permanent settlement of the migrant population adversely affects the employment rate in Serbia.

Three-quarters of the respondents believe that the integration of migrants puts a lot of pressure on public finances, while they do not see significant development opportunities with the influx of foreign aid. However, if adequate means were taken from international funds and used for the integration of refugees, the majority of respondents would be inclined to accept their permanent settlement in Serbia. The economic role of the migrant population is most frequently seen by the respondents as doing low-paid work (cheap labour) and jobs that the local population does not want to do (farmers in abandoned rural areas).

Overall, the economic effects of the settlement of migrants are seen, more or less, in an unfavourable light by close to half of the respondents (45%), while 16% of the respondents see the possibilities as very or somewhat favourable. A quarter of the respondents consider the effects to be neutral, while one in eight respondents did not know how to respond (Figure 4).

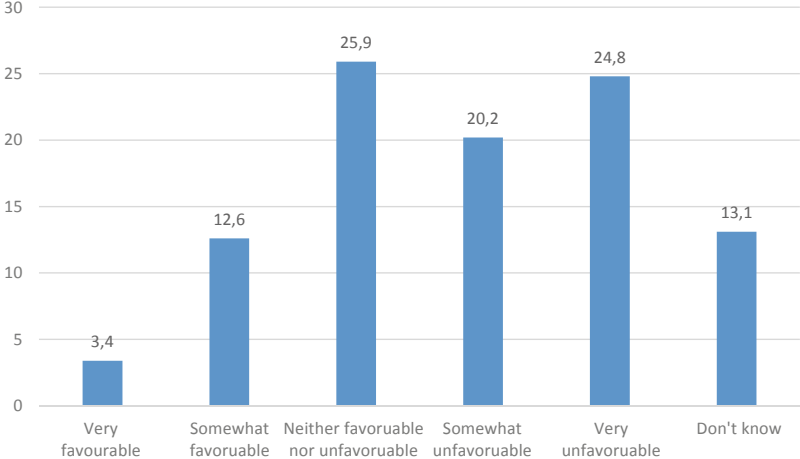


Figure 4: The perception of the economic effects of the permanent settlement of migrants on the development of Serbia

The safety potential and the obstacles to integration

Following the economic obstacles, **the security issue** is also considered to be a significant obstacle to integration. Most of the respondents see that certain security risks could bring an increased influx of migrants and their integration. Most of the respondents consider that an increase in the influx of the migrant population and their integration could bring certain safety risks.

The majority of citizens (52%) believe that the influx and permanent settlement of migrants could have a negative impact on the safety of Serbian citizens, especially vulnerable groups such as women and children. Citizens consider *the reduction in the level of public hygiene* (50%) and *the emergence of new diseases* (51.7%) as one of the potential risks of (inadequate) integration.

The political potential and the obstacles to integration

Citizens see the overall *political* implications of the settlement of migrants in a somewhat more positive light compared with the economic and security dimensions, although in this respect the anticipation of adverse effects also predominate. Less than a quarter of the respondents expect favourable effects, while almost one-third of the respondents have a neutral attitude. Almost one-third of the respondents stress the negative implications of this process to a greater or lesser extent, while almost a quarter of the respondents did not know.

The cultural potential and the obstacles to integration

Most of the respondents recognise possible changes in *the ethnic-religious structure* of Serbian society in the event of the mass retention of migrants. According to one third of the respondents, the arrival of migrants will not positively or negatively affect the cultural situation in Serbia. Nearly one-fifth of the respondents more or less believe the effects to be beneficial, while just over one-third of the respondents believe them to be negative. The majority of the respondents do not recognise the significant potential of the development of a multicultural environment and the growth of inter-ethnic and religious tolerance.

The demographic obstacles and the possibilities of integration

With regard to future demographic trends, it can be concluded that the respondents are the least familiar with the implications caused by the influx of migrants, compared with other aspects.

The respondents are generally not familiar with the possibilities of the “rejuvenation” of the demographically relatively old European nations (including Serbia), and improvements to the economic structure of the population (the ratio between the active and inactive population).

The main problems of local communities regarding the settlement of migrants - the perception of citizens

According to two-thirds of the respondents, in the case of the permanent settlement scenario, one of the problems that migrants might encounter locally is *the lack of employment*. Another problem of a socio-economic character stands out - *insufficient opportunities to provide adequate living and working conditions*. Another obstacle to integration is *insufficient professional help to teach the language and local customs*. According to approximately two-thirds of the respondents, there is a problem regarding *the lack of adequate support in resolving the legal status of refugees*. Slightly less than a half of the respondents consider the *political context*, i.e. the lack of political support for integration, as a large or very large problem concerning integration. The predominant opinion of those surveyed is that *the resistance of the local population* could also be a significant obstacle.

The majority of the citizens partially blame local non-governmental organizations and international organizations for potential integration difficulties due to their lack of interest in adequately resolving this problem.

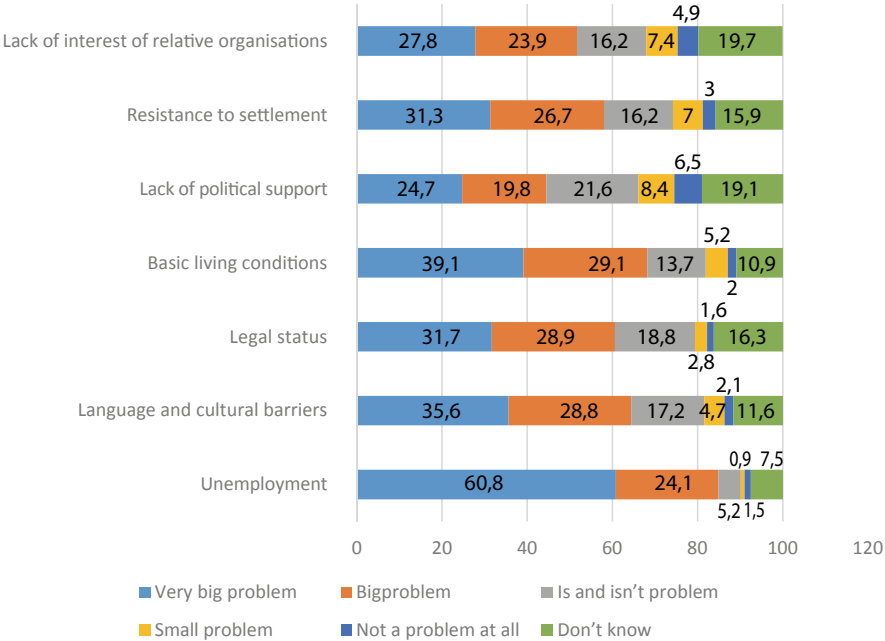


Figure 5: The most important local problems with the permanent settlement of migrants

7. THE OPINION OF LOCAL DECISION-MAKERS ON INTEGRATION

In terms of preferences regarding which ethnic group they would like in their environment, *Red Cross* officials, the Center for Social Work and non-governmental organisations have shown **a high degree of professionalism**. In their narratives, they believe that they have no right to choose or have a preference for the people they would like to work with.

It does not matter where they are from. Serbia is an open country, which is something we have shown in the previous period. (Officer from the Centre for Social Work)

However, when taking the process of integration and the potential reaction of the population into consideration, people from big cities, from Syria and Iraq, would fit in easier into the local community, accept and understand the customs and way of life of the local population, and therefore cause less resentment among the local population compared to refugees who are from the villages, backward regions and from Afghanistan. In ethnically mixed areas of southern and eastern Serbia, the common attitude is that, if possible, the identification of the religious affiliation and practices of the refugee population should be taken into account.

Most experts and members of the municipal administrations agree that it should make no difference if the people who settle in their community are young or old, educated or not, have or do not have professional skills and qualifications, and that everyone, without distinction, will be treated in a professional manner. However, considering the challenges that their professional services and integration itself face, a significant number of them still consider that children and a younger and more educated population would fit in more easily in a local context.

The optimal number of refugees The optimal numbers are estimated at several dozen families per municipality. The respondents cited that the optimal number of the newly-settled population should not exceed 5% of the national population. In terms of territorial relocation within Serbia, the following ideas emerged. All agree that it is best to distribute the refugees throughout the country, i.e. that the best way to integrate them is to settle a certain number of families in each municipality. Most agree that the immigrants should not be ghettoized, and that in the long term opportunities should be created for this population to be fully integrated into the local milieu. This generally means that they are relocated in smaller groups within the territory of the whole of the municipality.

Long-term solutions to the housing status of refugees To solve the housing situation of refugees in the long-term, respondents suggested several solutions. The first involves the allocation of abandoned houses in villages (or towns, if any), together with a piece of land, which nobody uses anyway. These houses would be purchased from the owners from national or international funds, renovated and handed over to the asylum seekers. The second involves a symbiosis between work and housing, wherever possible. An example of this is the elderly population in need of care. The third

solution involves public tenders by the local population who have a surplus of accommodation. These surpluses could be given to refugees, and in return the owners would be exempt from paying, for example, electricity, taxes, etc. This model was applied in the past with the integration of refugees from the former Yugoslavia. The fourth proposal relates to the possible construction of new housing for the asylum seekers. In this case, it is stressed that it would be best to assign a number of housing units to the local population that is socially vulnerable.

Labour Market integration In discussions with experts and decision-makers regarding employment opportunities in municipalities, three key issues were mentioned: 1. the municipalities do not have enough jobs even for the local population; 2. it depends on the competencies of the refugees themselves and 3. agricultural and temporary/seasonal jobs. All three issues reflect a very low chance of the inclusion of the population on the labour market without any special preparation and focused aid. The underdevelopment of the market implies that developed measures of support are necessary.

The dominant issues - the local population and potential resistance A number of issues stand out when it comes to the sources of potential resistance from the local population, but the three most important are: economic competition, fear of terrorism and cultural misunderstanding. The first is the fear that the local population will have to accept a population that is itself without resources and with whom it will have to share an already quite undeveloped market. Among most of the respondents this fear is the prevailing fear regarding the refugee population

There is the fear that they are stealing jobs. Locals can object, and we had this problem in 1991 and 1995 (Official from the Municipal Administration).

Another cause for concern is fear for their safety. Fear of terrorism and the possibility that some of the refugees will bring security risks to local areas are most commonly seen as the basis for the current and potentially future distancing of this population.

Fear, terrorism, fear of the unknown, of Islamism (Official from an NGO).

Fear of the increase of violence in towns, in their groups, as well as local groups, and family violence, because many come from places that have been at war for 20 years (Official from the Centre for Social Work).

However, in addition to the fear of terrorism, there is some concern about the attitude towards violence of people from other cultures, which leads us to the third most frequent discourse – huge cultural and religious differences. This concern is present in the border municipalities where there is already an unstable ethnic and religious balance and where every settlement would be seen as a disruption.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Institutional resources

Whatever population permanently settles in Serbia, the municipal administrations, professional services and non-governmental organizations will demonstrate high levels of professionalism and do whatever is in their power to integrate this population according to the plans, and in the best possible way. The professional services in Belgrade have shown the highest level of readiness to integrate refugees.

The resources which the municipal administration, social work centers and non-governmental organizations have, is not sufficient to cope with the integration of the refugee population. The municipal authorities are ready to respond to all the challenges at an organizational level, but consider that there are not enough resources in their budget that could be allocated exclusively for the needs of the newly arrived population. The needs of the professional services are sporadic regarding professional staff and training.

Help with integration is expected from government institutions, international governmental and non-governmental organizations.

The relocation of refugees

When planning the relocation of migrants, it is necessary to distribute them evenly across the whole territory of Serbia, but the greatest resistance can be expected in small towns (villages). The optimal solution would be the permanent settlement of refugees across the whole territory of Serbia. A few to a few dozen families should be settled in each municipality. It would be desirable that these families within the municipality be located relatively close to each other so that communication between them is possible, but they should not be concentrated together because it creates the possibility of ghettoisation.

The integration of refugees

Before making any decision on the relocation of refugees, it is very important to have a clear profile of the population: age, family status, education, work experience and others. The manner and scope of their integration will depend on their skills, knowledge and experience

Personal contact with migrants greatly reduces resistance to migrants and it would be good to find a way so that the largest possible number of citizens comes in contact with migrants in some way.

Experience of the integration of refugees from the wars on the territory of the former Yugoslavia is an important resource that should be considered when making integration strategies. Taking into consideration the good practices of the past, working together, shared housing and cultural exchanges are possible.

If several different ethnic groups are settled in Serbia, care should be taken to separate them from each other (relocate them in different municipalities) where there is traditional and/or current conflict between such groups.

The relocation of refugees in border zones and areas where otherwise there are several ethnic groups and/or religions could be a source of resentment among the local population. The settlement of refugees could disrupt the ethnic and religious balance which is seen as a potential source of instability, particularly in the south and southeast of the country.

Employment integration and the issue of development

Their employment integration and also the territorial relocation will depend on the structure of the economy of the municipality. Agriculture and life in rural areas are seen as the most common options for work in economically undeveloped areas.

It is necessary to devise a strategy involving the local population when any kind of assistance is directed towards the refugee population. It is a great challenge to help this population in a situation where there is high poverty, unemployment and unresolved housing issues among the local population. If possible, the integration of refugees should also include resolving the problems of specific vulnerable individuals and families among the local population. In this way, ethnic competition would be reduced.

Generally speaking, the citizens of Serbia do not see the potential and development opportunities that could be realized with the arrival of migrants. In this sense, the key recommendations for decision-makers is that in the case of the permanent settlement of a specific number of refugees and migrants, it would be necessary to carry out an extensive campaign aimed to raise awareness among citizens and point out the positive effects that the integration of this population could have on the economy, culture and political situation in Serbia, as well as on the overall quality of life of the local population.

In addition, the attitudes of the population are not fully formed and nor are their expectations regarding the possible implications of the social aspect and individual quality of life. This also emphasizes the importance of providing various forms of education urgently so that the population could adequately prepare on time for the arrival of specific numbers of migrants.

It is necessary to develop media communication with the aim to relativise negative and promote the positive aspects of the integration of migrants because it has been shown that the media plays a key role in the formation of attitudes towards migrants.